

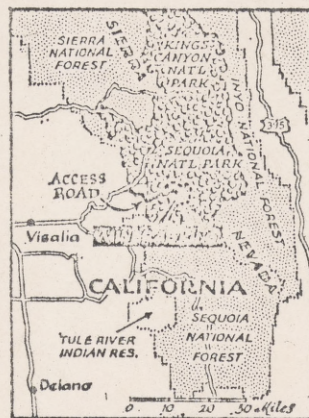
## The Scandal of Mineral King

The attempt of the Forest Service to turn Mineral King Valley in California over to the Walt Disney Organization demonstrates how an ingrown bureaucracy and an aggressive private developer can collaborate to defeat the public interest. The lawsuit filed against this scheme by the Sierra Club is an effort to demonstrate that citizen conservationists can invoke the power of the law to protect the public interest.

The intensive development of this valley in the Sierra Nevada would scar its natural beauty, ruin its ecological balance, and pollute its air and water. The Disney interests propose to build an "Alpine village" complete with ski tows, swimming pools, a golf course, a hotel complex, ten restaurants, and a huge underground parking lot. This would be a year-round resort with at least a million visitors annually. It would produce the same kind of serious overcrowding that has already blighted the much larger Yosemite Valley.

The stated intentions of the Disney interests make unmistakably clear what is to befall Mineral King: "Grooming and manicuring of most slopes . . . will require extensive bulldozing and blasting in most lower areas and extensive rock removal at higher elevations . . . extensive cuts and fills and site grading will be required in the parking area and in the village area."

Hundreds of resorts and country clubs already exist and more can always be manufactured, but beautiful, unspoiled Alpine valleys are rare. When the last one has been groomed, manicured, bulldozed and blasted out of existence, no human being can create another.



This unalterable fact imposes a most solemn obligation upon public officials who administer the national parks and forests. With regard to the fate of Mineral King, the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior in the Johnson Administration compiled an abysmal record. Former Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman pushed aggressively for the Disney plan which his Forest Service subordinate sponsored. After considerable initial resistance, former Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall caved in and granted permission for the construction of an access highway across Sequoia National Park, without which the development of the valley could not proceed.

Their successors—Secretary of Agriculture Hardin and Secretary of the Interior Hickel—have an opportunity to right this wrong. They can still quash the Disney plan. But in the absence of action on their part, the Sierra Club has taken the issue to the courts. Its suit points out that the Forest Service approved the Disney project without public hearings and without making a prior study of the ecological effects of intensive development. Moreover, the Disney project would directly involve 300 acres and indirectly involve another 1,300 even though the law forbids the Secretary of Agriculture to put more than 80 acres under long-term lease.

Who watches the watchmen? The question is as old as Plato and as modern as the Mineral King case. Private greed, bureaucratic empire building, and official irresponsibility are a recurrent threat to the common good. The Sierra Club is performing a public service in standing up to this threat.